# FROM MALACHI TO MATTHEW.

THE close of the Old Testament canon left Israel in two great divisions. The mass of the nation were dispersed throughout the Persian Empire, more as colonists than captives. A remnant, chiefly of the tribe of Judah, with Zerubbabel, a prince of the Davidic family, and the survivors of the priests and Levites, had returned to the land under the permissive decrees of Cyrus and his successors (Dan. 5. 31, *note;* 9. 25, *note*), and had established again the temple worship. Upon this remnant the interest of the student of Scripture centres; and this interest concerns both their political and religious history.

I. Politically, the fortunes of the Palestinian Jews followed, with one exception —the Maccabean revolt—the history of the Gentile world-empires foretold by Daniel (Dan. 2., 7.).

(1) The Persian rule continued about one hundred years after the close of the O.T. canon, and seems to have been mild and tolerant, allowing to the high priest, along with his religious functions, a measure of civil power, but under the overlordship of the governors of Syria. The sources of the history of the Jewish remnant during the Persian period were purely legendary when Josephus wrote. During this period the rival worship of Samaria (John 4. 19, 20) was established.

Palestine suffered much from the constant wars between Persia and Egypt, lying as it did "between the anvil and the hammer."

(2) In 333 B.C. Syria fell under the power of the third of the world-empires, the Græco-Macedonian of Alexander. That conqueror, as Josephus relates, was induced to treat the Jews with much favour; but, upon the breaking up of his empire, Judæa again fell between the hammer and the anvil of Syria and Egypt, falling first under the power of Syria, but later under Egypt as ruled by the Ptolemaic kings. During this period (B.C. 320–198) great numbers of Jews were established in Egypt, and the Septuagint translation of the O.T. was made (B.C. 285).

(3) In B.C. 198 Judæa was conquered by Antiochus the Great, and annexed to Syria. At this time the division of the land into the five provinces familiar to readers of the Gospels, Galilee, Samaria, Judæa (often collectively called *Judæa*), Trachonitis and Peræa, was made. The Jews at first were permitted to live under their own laws under the high priest and a council. About B.C. 180 the land became the dowry of Cleopatra, a Syrian princess married to Ptolemy Philometor, king of Egypt, but on the death of Cleopatra was reclaimed by Antiochus Epiphanes (the "little horn" of Dan. 8. 9, *note*), after a bloody battle. In 170 B.C., Antiochus, after repeated interferences with the temple and priesthood, plundered Jerusalem, profaned the temple, and enslaved great numbers of the inhabitants. December 25, B.C. 168, Antiochus offered a sow upon the great altar, and erected an altar to Jupiter. This is the "desolation" of Dan. 8. 13, type of the final "abomination of desolation" of Mt. 24. 15. The temple worship was forbidden, and the people compelled to eat swine's flesh.

(4) The excesses of Antiochus provoked the revolt of the Maccabees, one of the most heroic pages of history. Mattathias, the first of the Maccabees, a priest of great sanctity and energy of character, began the revolt. He did little more than to gather a band of godly and determined Jews pledged to free the nation and restore the ancient worship, and was succeeded by his son Judas, known in history as Maccabæus, from the Hebrew word for hammer. He was assisted by four brothers of whom Simon is best known.

In B.C. 165 Judas regained possession of Jerusalem, purified and rededicated the temple, an event celebrated in the Jewish Feast of the Dedication. The struggle with Antiochus and his successor continued. Judas was slain in battle, his brother Jonathan succeeding. In him the civil and priestly authority were united (B.C. 143). Under Jonathan, his brother Simon, and his nephew John Hyrcanus, the Hasmonean line of priest-rulers was established, under sufferance of other powers. They possessed none of the Maccabean virtues.

(5) A civil war followed, which was terminated by the Roman conquest of Judæa and Jerusalem by Pompey (B.C. 63), who left Hyrcanus, the last of the Hasmoneans, a nominal sovereignty, Antipater, an Idumean, wielding the actual power. B.C. 47 Antipater was made procurator of Judæa by Julius Cæsar, and appointed his son.

Herod, governor of Galilee. After the murder of Cæsar disorder ensued in Judæa, and Herod fled to Rome. There he was appointed (B.C. 40) king of the Jews, and returning, he conciliated the people by his marriage (B.C. 38) with Mariamne, the beautiful grand-daughter of Hyrcanus, and appointed her brother, the Maccabean Aristobulus III., high priest. Herod was king when Jesus Christ was born.

II. The religious history of the Jews during the long period from Malachi (B.C. 450) to Christ followed, as to outer ceremonial, the high-priestly office, and the temple worship, the course of the troublous political history, and is of scant interest.

Of greater moment are the efforts and means by which the real faith of Israel was kept alive and nurtured.

(1) The tendency to idolatry seems to have been destroyed by the Jews' experience and observation of it during the captivity. Deprived of temple and priest, and of the possibility of continuing a ceremonial worship, the Jewish people were thrown back upon that which was fundamental in their faith, the revelation of God as One, the Creator, to be conceived of as having made man in His own image. and therefore as having such analogies to the nature and life of man as to be comprehensible by man, while remaining the Eternal Spirit, God. This conception of God, enforced by the mighty ministries of the pre-exilic and exilic prophets, finally prevailed over all idolatrous conceptions, and this ministry was continued amongst the returned remnant by Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The high ethics of the older prophets, their stern rebuke of mere formalism, and their glowing prophecies of the ultimate restoration of Israel in national and religious supremacy under Messiah, were all repeated by the three prophets of the restoration.

The problem was to keep alive this exalted ideal in the midst of outward persecutions and sordid and disgraceful divisions within.

(2) The organic means to this end was the synagogue, an institution which formed no part of the biblical order of the national life. Its origin is obscure. Probably, during the captivity, the Jews, deprived of the temple and its rites, met on the Sabbath day for prayer. This would give opportunity for the reading of the Scriptures. Such meetings would require some order of procedure, and some authority for the restraint of disorder. The synagogue doubtless grew out of the necessities of the situation in which the Jews were placed, but it served the purpose of maintaining familiarity with the inspired writings, and upon these the spiritual life of the true Israel (see Rom. 9. 6, *note*) was nourished.

(3) But during this period, also, was created that mass of tradition, comment and interpretation, known as Mishna, Gemara (forming the Talmud, Halachoth, Midrashim and Kabbala, so superposed upon the Law that obedience was transferred from the Law itself to the traditional interpretation).

(4) During this period also rose the two great sects known to the Gospel narratives as Pharisees and Sadducees. (See Mt. 3. 11, *notes* 1, 2.) The Herodians were a party rather than a sect.

Amongst such a people, governed, under the suzerainty of Rome, by an Idumean usurper, rent by bitter and unspiritual religious controversies, and maintaining an elaborate religious ritual, appeared Jesus, the Son and Christ of God.

The Scofield Reference Bible

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WITH A NEW SYSTEM OF CONNECTED TOPICAL REFERENCES TO ALL THE GREATER THEMES OF SCRIPTURE, WITH ANNOTATIONS, REVISED MARGINAL RENDERINGS, SUMMARIES, DEFINITIONS, CHRONOLOGY, AND INDEX

TO WHICH ARE ADDED

HELPS AT HARD PLACES, EXPLANATIONS OF SEEMING DISCREPANCIES, AND A NEW SYSTEM OF PARAGRAPHS


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# THE FOUR GOSPELS.

THE four Gospels record the eternal being, human ancestry, birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus the Christ, Son of God, and Son of Man. They record also a selection from the incidents of His life, and from His words and works. Taken together, they set forth, not a biography but a Personality.

These two facts, that we have in the four Gospels a complete Personality, but not a complete biography, indicate the spirit and intent in which we should approach them. What is important is that through these narratives we should come to see and know Him whom they reveal. It is of relatively small importance that we should be able to piece together out of these confessedly incomplete records (John 21. 25) a connected story of His life. For some adequate reason—perhaps lest we should be too much occupied with "Christ after the flesh"—it did not please God to cause to be written a biography of His Son. The twenty-nine formative years are passed over in a silence which is broken but once, and that in but twelve brief verses of Luke's Gospel. It may be well to respect the divine reticencies.

But the four Gospels, though designedly incomplete as a story, are divinely perfect as a revelation. We may not through them know everything that He did, but we may know the Doer. In four great characters, each of which completes the other three, we have Jesus Christ Himself. The Evangelists never describe Christ —they set Him forth. They tell us almost nothing of what they thought about Him, they let Him speak and act for Himself.

This is the essential respect in which these narratives differ from mere biography or portraiture. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." The student in whom dwells an ungrieved Spirit finds here the living Christ.

The distinctive part which each Evangelist bears in this presentation of the living Christ is briefly noted in separate Introductions, but it may be profitable to add certain general suggestions.

I. The Old Testament is a divinely provided Introduction to the New; and whoever comes to the study of the four Gospels with a mind saturated with the Old Testament foreview of the Christ, His person, work, and kingdom, will find them open books.

For the Gospels are woven of Old Testament quotation, allusion, and type. The very first verse of the New Testament drives the thoughtful reader back to the Old; and the risen Christ sent His disciples to the ancient oracles for an explanation of His sufferings and glory (Lk. 24. 27, 44, 45). One of His last ministries was the opening of their understandings to understand the Old Testament.

Therefore, in approaching the study of the Gospels the mind should be freed, so far as possible, from mere theological concepts and presuppositions. Especially is it necessary to exclude the notion—a legacy in Protestant thought from post-apostolic and Roman Catholic theology—that the Church is the true Israel, and that the Old Testament foreview of the kingdom is fulfilled in the Church.

Do not, therefore, assume interpretations to be true because familiar. Do not assume that "the throne of David" (Lk. 1. 32) is synonymous with "My Father's throne" (Rev. 3. 21), or that "the house of Jacob" (Lk. 1. 33) is the Church composed both of Jew and Gentile.

II. The mission of Jesus was, *primarily*, to the Jews (Mt. 10. 5, 6; 15. 23-25; John 1. 11). He was "made under the law" (Gal. 4. 4), and was "a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" (Rom. 15. 8), and to fulfil the law that grace might flow out.

Expect, therefore, a strong legal and Jewish colouring up to the cross (e.g. Mt. 5. 17-19; 6. 12; cf. Eph. 4. 32; Mt. 10. 5, 6; 15. 22-28; Mk. 1. 44; Mt. 23. 2, etc.). The Sermon on the Mount is law, not grace, for it demands as the condition of blessing (Mt. 5. 3-9) that perfect character which grace, through divine power, creates (Gal. 5. 22, 23).

III. The *doctrines* of grace are to be sought in the Epistles, not in the Gospels; but those doctrines rest back upon the death and resurrection of Christ, and upon the great germ-truths to which He gave utterance, and of which the Epistles are the unfolding. Furthermore, the only perfect example of perfect grace is the Christ of the Gospels.

IV. The Gospels do not unfold the doctrine of the Church. The word occurs in Matthew only. After His rejection as King and Saviour by the Jews, our Lord, announcing a mystery until that moment "hid in God" (Eph. 3. 3–10), said, "I will build my church" (Mt. 16. 16, 18). It was, therefore, yet future; but His personal ministry had gathered out the believers who were, on the day of Pentecost, by the baptism with the Spirit, made the first members of "the church which is his body" (1 Cor. 12. 12, 13; Eph. 1. 23).

The Gospels present a group of Jewish disciples, associated on earth with a Messiah in humiliation; the Epistles a Church which is the body of Christ in glory, associated with Him in the heavenlies, co-heirs with Him of the Father, co-rulers with Him over the coming kingdom, and, as to the earth, pilgrims and strangers (1 Cor. 12. 12, 13; Eph. 1. 3–14, 20–23; 2. 4–6; 1 Pet. 2. 11).

V. The Gospels present Christ in His three offices of Prophet, Priest, and King.

As *Prophet* His ministry does not differ in kind from that of the Old Testament prophets. It is the dignity of His Person which makes Him the unique Prophet. Of old, God spoke through the prophets; now He speaks in the Son (Heb. 1. 1, 2). The old prophet was a voice from God; the Son is God Himself (Deut. 18. 18, 19).

The prophet in any dispensation is God's messenger to His people, first to establish truth, and, secondly, when they are in declension and apostasy to call them back to truth. His message, therefore, is, usually, one of rebuke and appeal. Only when these fall on deaf ears does he become a foreteller of things to come. In this, too, Christ is at one with the other prophets. His predictive ministry follows His rejection as King.

The sphere and character of Christ's *Kingly* office are defined in the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7. 8–16, and *refs.*), as interpreted by the prophets, and confirmed by the New Testament. The latter in no way abrogates or modifies either the Davidic Covenant or its prophetic interpretation. It adds details which were not in the prophet's vision. The Sermon on the Mount is an elaboration of the idea of "righteousness" as the predominant characteristic of the Messianic kingdom (Isa. 11. 2–5; Jer. 23. 5, 6; 33. 14–16). The Old Testament prophet was perplexed by seeing in one horizon, so to speak, the suffering and the glory of Messiah (1 Pet. 1. 10, 11). The New Testament shows that these are separated by the present church-age, and points forward to the Lord's return as the time when the Davidic Covenant of blessing through power will be fulfilled (Lk. 1. 30–33; Acts 2. 29–36; 15. 14–17); just as the Abrahamic Covenant of blessing through suffering was fulfilled at His first coming (Acts 3. 25; Gal. 3. 6–14).

Christ is never called King of the Church. "The King" is indeed one of the divine titles, and the Church in her worship joins Israel in exalting "the king, eternal, immortal, invisible" (Psa. 10. 16; 1 Tim. 1. 17). But the Church is to reign with Him. The Holy Spirit is now calling out, not the subjects, but the co-heirs and co-rulers of the kingdom (2 Tim. 2. 11, 12; Rev. 1. 6; 3. 21; 5. 10; Rom. 8. 15–18; 1 Cor. 6. 2, 3).

Christ's *Priestly* office is the complement of His prophetic office. The prophet is God's representative with the people; the priest is the people's representative with God. Because they are sinful he must be a sacrificer; because they are needy he must be a compassionate intercessor (Heb. 5. 1, 2; 8. 1–3). So Christ, on the cross, entered upon His high-priestly work, offering Himself without spot unto God (Heb. 9. 14), as now He compassionates His people in an ever-living intercession (Heb. 7. 25). Of that intercession John 17. is the pattern.

VI. Distinguish, in the Gospels, *interpretation* from *moral application*. Much in the Gospels which belongs in strictness of interpretation to the Jew or the kingdom, is yet such a revelation of the mind of God, and so based on eternal principles, as to have a moral application to the people of God whatever their position dispensationally. It is always true that the "pure in heart" are happy because they "see God," and that "woe" is the portion of religious formalists whether under law or grace.

VII. Especial emphasis rests upon that to which all four Gospels bear a united testimony. That united testimony is sevenfold:

1. In all alike is revealed the one unique Personality. The one Jesus is King in Matthew, Servant in Mark, Man in Luke, and God in John. But not only so: for Matthew's King is also Servant, Man, and God; and Mark's Servant is also King, and Man, and God; Luke's Man is also King, and Servant, and God; and John's eternal Son is also King, and Servant, and Man.

The pen is a different pen; the incidents in which He is seen are sometimes different incidents; the distinctive character in which He is presented is a different character; but He is always the same Christ. That fact alone would mark these books as inspired.

2. All the Evangelists record the ministry of John the Baptist.

3. All record the feeding of the five thousand.

4. All record Christ's offer of Himself as King, according to Micah.

5. All record the betrayal by Judas; the denial by Peter; the trial, crucifixion, and literal resurrection of Christ. And this record is so made as to testify that the death of Christ was the supreme business which brought Him into the world; that all which precedes that death is but preparation for it; and that from it flow all the blessings which God ever has or ever will bestow upon man.

6. All record the resurrection ministry of Christ; a ministry which reveals Him as unchanged by the tremendous event of His passion, but a ministry keyed to a new note of universality, and of power.

7. All point forward to His second coming.

## HOW TO USE THE SUBJECT REFERENCES.

THE subject references lead the reader from the first clear mention of a great truth to the last. The first and last references (in parenthesis) are repeated each time, so that wherever a reader comes upon a subject he may recur to the first reference and follow the subject, or turn at once to the Summary at the last reference.

### ILLUSTRATION

(at Mark 1. 1.)

| |
|---|
| *b Gospel.* vs. 1,14,15; Mk. 8.35. (Gen. 12.1-3; Rev. 14.6.) |

Here *Gospel* is the subject; vs. 1, 14, 15 show where it is at that particular place; Mk. 8. 35 is the next reference in the chain, and the references in parenthesis are the first and last.